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HEADLINE: New Study Says Federal Agencies Smoking Policies Inadequate

BYLINE: By LES BLUMENTHAL, Associated Press Writer

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Smoking Study

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Federal agencies have failed to adopt policies that adequately separate non-smoking employees from those who smoke and have treated the problem as a social rather than a health and safety issue, according to a federally commissioned report released today.

"Effective smoking control policies are an achievable goal of the government, but this requires a commitment to address the issue," said the report from the non-profit Smoking Policy Institute. "Close examination shows that this issue needs more careful consideration."

The report, requested by the U.S. Surgeon General and the U.S. Office on Smoking and Health, also said the General Services Administration's 1986 requirement that federal agencies implement smoking controls for their employees was too broad.

"The GSA regulations do not adequately protect non-smoking employees and the agencies are not fully in compliance with even this minimum standard," the report said. "Government agencies are responding to the 'letter' of the GSA smoking regulations but not their spirit."

The GSA regulations require that smoking be held to an "absolute minimum" in areas where there are non-smokers, but the report found that at most federal agencies it was impossible for employees to go through an entire day without routinely being exposed to smoke.

Rather than actually separating smokers from non-smokers in different rooms, the report found that many agencies have just established a policy of providing separate smoking areas in such rooms as cafeterias, lobbies and snack bars.

"It's a classic example of government making a rule, than adding a hundred exceptions," said Robert Rosner, executive director of the Seattle-based institute. "Rather than admitting smoking presents a health problem and isolating smoking in the workplace, the agencies have set up this Byzantine

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house of cards."

Rosner was scheduled to testify today before the federal Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health.

A GSA spokesman said his agency was not aware of the report and that in general the agency felt that government efforts to control smoking in the workplace have "gone well."

"We are not aware of any major problems," said Steve Guilheen. "Some of the agencies were a little slow in implementing the regulations, but that has been squared away."

The report reviewed the smoking policies at seven government agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor.

"By failing to comply fully with GSA regulations, the majority of federal agencies are open to lawsuits from their non-smoking employees," the report said. "By acknowledging the problem, but not resolving it, the government is potentially negligent and has made itself a target for lawsuits by its employees."

The report said the agencies surveyed tended to treat so-called sidestream smoke as a social rather than a health and safety problem.

"This inconsistency with the government's treatment of other health and safety issues also increases potential liability," the report said.

The Smoking Policy Institute works with various organizations and businesses on the issue of smoking in the workplace.

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